A LENT-LECTURE FOR THE DESERTER: OR, A DISSWASIVE From Forsaking PARISH-CHURCHES.

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Quò fugis, ah demens? ------Proper.
I, fuge; sed poteras tutior esse domi.

THough the Division of *Church-es* into Parish-Bounds under the Conduct of a Parochial Minister, be not founded on any Ex-ress Law of God, yet it is so highly seful to all the great ends of *Church-ommunion*, that it must needs be a ry great fault lightly or wantonly violate so wholsom an Institution.

Desiring therefore to preserve the Peace and Order of the Church, and to promote the real Edification of Christian People, I shall (in the words of a Learned Author) offer six weighty Particulars unto the Impartial *Consideration* of all those Persons who wou'd be thought true Sons of the Church of *England*, and yet ordinarily forsake the *Communion* of their *Parish-Churches.*

And becaufe the great Plea which is made by those who communicate with our *Church*, for forsaking their *Parish Church*, is the different Abilities of *Preachers*, and every one is desirous to hear those *Preachers*, whom he *likes best*, and thinks there is no hurt in it: I shall as plainly as I can, and with as little offence as may be, consider this matter.

I. And first I observe, that this is a great pretence of others for separation from our *Church*, that they can profit more by *Non-Conforming* than

than by *Conforming Preachers.* And therefore forſake our *Churches*, and joyn themſelves to *Separate Congregations*; and methinks wiſe and good Men ſhould not like a *Principle* which ſo eaſily leads Men into *Separation*, and ends in *Schiſm.* I confeſs there is a great deal of difference between taking the beſt Care we can of our Souls in the *Communion of the Church*, and involving our ſelves in the guilt of *Schiſm* upon this pretence; but yet that is a ſuſpicious *Argument*, which tends towards *Schiſm*; which in its greateſt Innocency breaks *good Order* and *wholeſome Conſtitutions*, and when it is fully purſued, may lead *giddy* and *unſtable Minds* into *Separation.*

II. There is ſo much Unaccountable *Fancy* and *Humour* to be ſeen in thoſe *different Judgments* Men make of *Preachers*, that it were a very hard caſe, if the *Peace*, *Order* and *Government* of the *Church*, were to lie at the Mercy of Mens different *Fancies.* Some are taken with a *grave* and *ſolid*, others with a *florid* and *polite* Preacher; ſome are pleaſed

with a *Tone*, others with *Earneſtneſs*, and *vehemence* of *Action* and *Voice*. How often do many Men vary in their *Opinions* of *Preachers*, and change their Churches as their Fancy changes? Thoſe Preachers who are *Diſlik'd* by their own Pariſhioners, are very often *Admir'd* by Strangers. Now what work would this make in all Civil Governments, were *Fancy* ſuffer'd to over-rule *Publick Eſtabliſhments*? And we have as little reaſon to expect that *God* will allow of ſuch *Inroads of Fancy* upon the *Order* and *Government of the Church*.

The deſign of *Church-Communion*, and of *Preaching the Goſpel*, is not to pleaſe and tickle a wanton *Fancy*, but to inſtruct us in the plain Duties of the Goſpel, and to furniſh us with the Arguments and Motives to a *Holy Life*; and thanks be to God, ſuch *Diſcourſes* we may meet with in moſt Churches, though it may be not always dreſs'd to every Mans Palate.

It is a ſign Men are full fed, when they cannot be contented with plain and wholeſom *Food*, but complain if they have not ſome delicious *Sauces* to create and tempt an *Appetite*. This I am ſure is certain, That Men, who govern themſelves by ſuch Fancies, do not always make the wiſeſt Choice, nor the beſt Improvements.

III. Suppoſe your *Parochial Miniſters* do not appear to be the beſt *Preachers*, the profoundeſt *Divines*, nor the moſt moving *Orators*;

tors; consider whether this may not in great measure be owing to your selves: Whether your with-drawing your selves from their Instructions, may not make them more slight and careless in their Preparations. Preachers are Men subject to *Humane Infirmities*, and in all Cases it is apt to dispirit Men to see all their pains and labour despised and slighted, especially in this Case, which makes them uncapable of doing that service to the Souls of Men which their Office requires, and which they so passionately desire. Men who are above the vanity of a *great Auditory*, are yet desirous to preach to those whom they are concerned to instruct, and are grieved to see them turn their Backs upon them. You might many times have better Sermons, did you not discourage your Preachers by such neglects.

IV. Consider further that you are particularly accountable for the Improvement of those means of Grace which you did or might have enjoyed in the Communion of your *Parish Churches*. God is not the Author of *Confusion*, but of *Order* and *Peace*; and therefore requires us to keep our station; and when the *Providence of God*, and the *Laws* of the *Church* and *State*, have placed us under such a Ministry, we are accountable for no more, than what we can enjoy with the preservation of the *Peace*, and *Order*, and *Government* of the *Church*; and if our Improvements be pro-

portionable to this, we ſhall not loſe our Reward.

But now ſuppoſe, by purſuing your wandring Fancies, ye fall into any Miſtakes, or are ignorant of any part of your Duty, when ye might have been better inſtructed, had ye diligently and conſtantly attended the *Parochial Miniſtry*, what excuſe can ſuch Men make for themſelves? They are miſled, but it was occaſioned by their forſaking that Guide whom the *Divine Providence* had provided for them; they ſin ignorantly, but they might have known better, had they not withdrawn themſelves from ſuch Inſtructions: Certainly thoſe Men act more ſafely with reference to a future Account, who make the beſt uſe they can of ſuch Inſtructions as the *Providence of God* provides for them, than thoſe who leave their Rank and Order, to chuſe better for themſelves.

V. We may alſo reaſonably expect the greater Aſſiſtances of the Divine Spirit in preſerving good Order, which will tend more to our ſpiritual increaſe and growth, than the beſt External means of *E*dification: The Succeſs does not depend upon the Gifts and Abilities of the *Preacher*, but upon the *Influences* of *Gods Grace*. *Who then is* Paul, *or who is* Apollos, *but Miniſters by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every Man? I have planted,* Apollos *watered,*

1 Cor. III. v, vi, vii.

tered, but God gave the Increaſe: So then, neither is he that planteth any thing, nor he that watereth, but God that giveth the increaſe. Some little imperfect hints may more inlighten our Minds, when the *Divine Spirit* is pleaſed to teach us, than the moſt exact and elaborate Diſcourſe; and *plain Truths*, without any *Art* or *Varniſh*, may be convey'd with more *Warmth* and *Vigour* to our Souls and Conſciences, and may affect us more than all the Charms of *Humane Eloquence*. If Men deſign only pleaſing their *Fancies*, that they may do better by gratifying their *Curioſity*; but he, who has no other end in hearing, but to ſave his Soul, ought principally to take care that he may enjoy the *Influences* of the *Holy Spirit*, which alone can make the external Miniſtry of the *Word* effectual; and the beſt way to do that, is to obſerve good order; for He is a Spirit of *Love*, and *Peace*, and *Unity*, and *Order*; and therefore is more concern'd to ſupply the *Defects* and *Imperfections* of *external Miniſtries*, which we conſcientiouſly ſubmit to, and diligently atend, to preſerve good Order in the *Church*.

VI. The conſtant attendance on a meaner *Miniſtry*, is much more for our edification, than an occaſional hearing much better Sermons: It is too much the humour of many Men, who forſake their *own Church*, to be conſtant

ſtant to *none*; and by this means they may hear a great many *excellent Sermons*, and yet not be thorowly inſtructed in all parts of their Duty: Whereas every Miniſter who makes Conſcience of inſtructing his *People* committed to him, will take care at one time or another, to teach them all the great Articles of Faith, *and Rules of Life*, which though it may not be ſo taking and popular, is yet more uſeful than ſome general diſcourſes, and preſſing and vehement *Exhortations* without a particular *Explication* of their duty; which ſhews the Advantage of attending a conſtant Miniſtry, eſpecially if Men would acquaint themſelves with their Miniſter, whereby he might the better underſtand how to apply himſelf to their particular caſes, to fit his Inſtructions to their Capacities, and his Counſels, Exhortations, and Reproofs, to their Spiritual Wants.

This may ſuffice to ſhew our Obligations to Parochial Communion: *Yet if any deſire fuller ſatisfaction in any thing relating to the preſent Subject, they may conſult the Reverend Dr.* William Sherlock's *Practical Diſcourſe of Religious Aſſemblies.*

The worſt ſpeak ſomething good; if all want ſence,
God takes a Text, and preacheth Patience.
Mr. George Herbet's Church-Porch.

DUBLIN, Printed by *Samuel Lee* for *Richard Wild*, Bookſeller in *Cork-Change*. 1694.